

BACK TO CAMPUS

While it's true that there's plenty of time to get a sense of direction, to get a sense of that bigger picture, I know that they have to actually be working at that a little. I barely succeed in restraining the urge to shout that there are more resources consolidated to help them here than there will be at almost any other future point in their lives.

Ashlin Salisbury, a recent journalism graduate says, "When I was in school, I basically lived off of student loans. I worked for two of the years I was [at school], but the last two years I wasn't able to get work-study I worried constantly about making ends meet, especially my senior year when I was living alone."

Ashlin is currently living in Portland and searching for a job. "I've applied for numerous jobs, too many to count. ... I have another interview [coming up] ... it's for an office assistant, so it's not a glam job but hey, it would pay the bills."

She questions right now the value of her education in the job market. "I really don't think that I will utilize my journalism degree to any extent. I think school in general taught me the value of communicating with others, but as classes go, I don't feel like I really learned that much of anything, aside from a class or two." She does concede, "Granted ... some of the blame lies with me, as I'm sure I didn't fully take advantage of the programs available to me."

In one class, a bright and talented young man gets a half-serious idea that he pitches for his student life issue-related feature assignment: Maybe there's a class action lawsuit for students who put in their time at college and get booted into a market where there are no jobs for them. Let's sue the university for our unemployability. Viva la revolution! I catch one of his classmates, a woman who is a grad student maybe 15 or 20 years his senior, smiling and shaking her head, politely refraining from a big give-me-a-break eye roll. She works full-time with the elderly while pursuing her master's degree and this dream of being a paid writer. She says to me after class, "Sometimes I just have to bite my tongue. Jobs are not an enti-

tlement! It's *always* difficult."

Nicole Sangsuree, a recent graduate in theater arts, with a minor in women and gender studies, knows this difficulty firsthand. "I'm working five jobs," she tells me when I meet her during training as a receptionist for Imagine, a local salon. Nicole finished school debt-free, without having to rely on credit cards or student loans. She was able to do this with through a Diversity Building scholarship, and, as with Ryan, help from family.

Now that she's graduated, however, Nicole is committed to supporting herself. She has realized that her true dream is to be a singer, someone who encourages social progress and awareness through music, a la Ani DiFranco or Tracy Chapman. With that dream in mind, she is also in the throes of learning to support herself, pay her bills, and hopefully save enough money to make a trip to her family's homeland of Thailand, where she will search for inspiration and experience to fuel her music. Thus, five jobs. Finding those jobs, she says, wasn't easy.

Nicole's original plan was to take a job waitressing. Intelligent, articulate, and the holder of a bachelor's degree, she says, "I thought I could at least be a waitress." But with the market in Eugene as competitive as it is, and Nicole having no waitressing experience, that door was closed off to her. So it started to turn into scurrying for something, anything. She found, "If you get a job, any job, you just take it." Here's what she's landed: driving and stocking pamphlet containers for an HIV outreach organization; working as an entry person at club music shows for Steinberg Presents; answering phones and making appointments for Imagine Salon;

working as a stock person in the UO Bookstore warehouse; scheduling and performing her own paid singing gigs, where she also tries to sell her CDs.

Here's what Nicole's schedule looked like last week: Monday she worked the day at the warehouse, then covered the front door



Chris Wriston, present store clerk, future novelist.

for a show at John Henry's that night. Tuesday she worked during the day at Imagine, then left at 5 pm for her own gig in Portland. She stayed overnight in Portland for another gig Wednesday, then headed north for yet another show in Seattle on Thursday night. After the Thursday night show (1 am or close to closing), Nicole headed back to Eugene to try and be ready for her 9:30 am shift at Imagine on Friday.

To put it mildly, Nicole feels a little frazzled. But she also thinks she should work as much as she can to save as much as possible. She worries a little that all of the side jobs are taking away from her ability to get things done for the singing career, such as rehearsing and burning CDs to sell. She knows, however that this isn't a permanent situation. And, she says with more than a little satisfaction, "When I get a paycheck, it feels like, 'Wow.' It feels like freedom."

Smith says, "For some students, there is a sense of entitlement. 'Gee, I've gone to college. Now where's my job?'" What students may not realize is there's another leap they have to make to connect the education with the job. "We do a lot of things," Smith says, "to help students, including workshops on resume writing and interviewing and job searching strategies, class presentations that we make, career fairs, of which we have one

each quarter, including a special one called the Humanity and Environment Career Fair that focuses on students looking for an alternative to the traditional corporate kind of direction." He explains that the UO has an employer relations coordinator in Portland who is out talking to employers, developing relationships, orchestrating a plan to identify organizations from across the spectrum of industry, because today's world of employment fundamentally rests on networking and relationships.

Are students relying too heavily on the Internet to come up with their employment game plan? "If one is doing a relatively balanced career search," says Smith, "the Internet would be about 30 percent and they would learn very quickly that they would have to have very strong experience in the position advertised [to have a chance]. The balance of their job search strategy should revolve around networking." To support students and to get them understanding those relationships, the career center has a mentor program that's intended to teach people how to do an informational interview and get them talking to people who are doing work that's of interest to them.

In my year of teaching, in spite of the harried schedules and workloads, students are successful, for the most part, at landing on their feet. I worry a little when they pitch story ideas about paralyzing credit card debt, or students they know who discover "creative" ways of making money (young women selling their eggs, students signing up for welfare, to name a few). But in the bigger scheme, they work, study, play and get ready for life after graduation. I'm pleasantly surprised to find that, given the political and economic climate of things, they realize they're fortunate to be in school, that it's a valuable opportunity to be supported and encouraged in the pursuit of their interests. They work through class assignments and side jobs, and more than a few work successfully through to landing great internships or excellent entry-level jobs right after graduation. An education, it seems, pays for itself in lots of different ways. **ew**

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